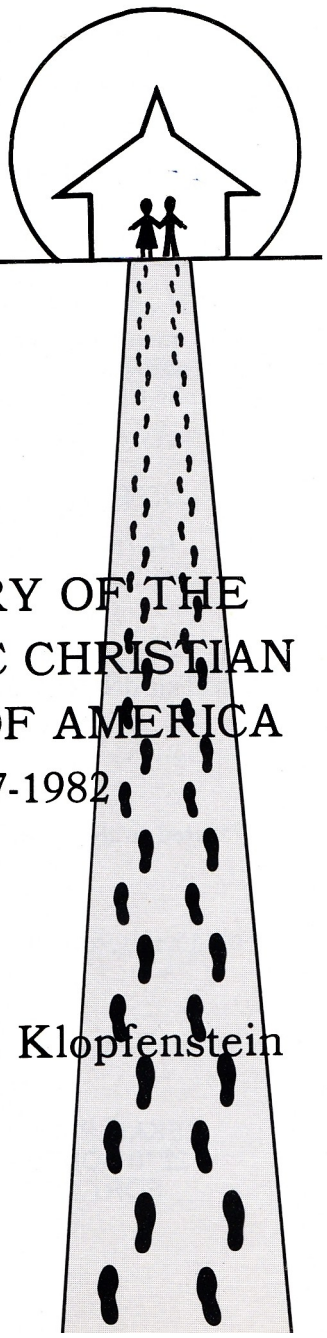
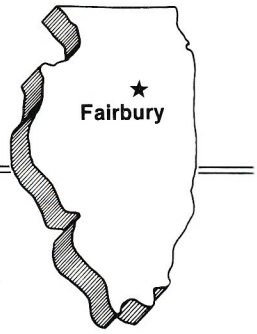
Marching To Zion



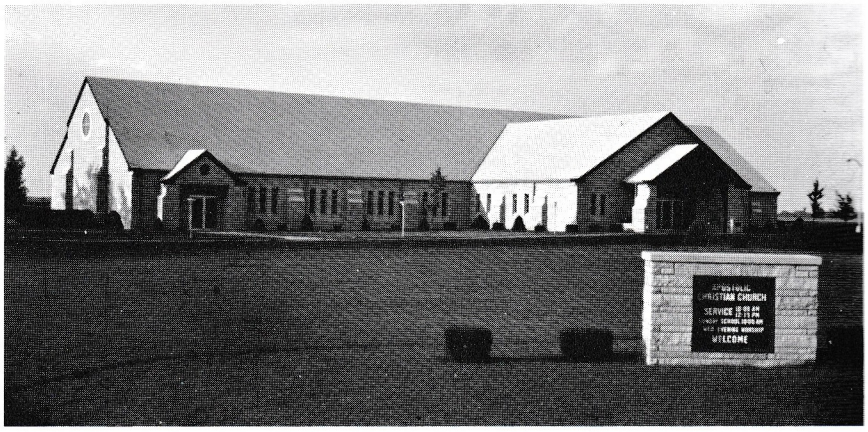
A HISTORY OF THE
APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN
CHURCH OF AMERICA
1847-1982

by Perry A. Klopfenstein

FAIRBURY, ILLINOIS



FAIRBURY, ILLINOIS
705 North Fourth Street



The church at Fairbury, Illinois, was the third of a cluster of three Apostolic Christian Churches which existed in the southeast portion of Livingston County prior to 1949. The others were the church north of Forrest (the North Side church) and the church southeast of Fairbury (the South Side church). These latter two churches were organized a few years previous to the one at Fairbury.

Some of the members who attended church at the North and South Side congregations eventually began attending the early meetings at Fairbury. They, along with an influx of people from the church in Europe, provided a nucleus from which a new church was born.

The village of Fairbury was organized seventeen years prior to the formation of the Apostolic Christian Church. Fairbury was laid out by Octave Chanute who was later to become a famous American aviation pioneer. Chanute Field in Rantoul, Illinois, a military installation of the U.S. Air Force,

is named after him. His associate in the platting of the town was Caleb L. Patton, original owner of the site.[5]

The Kellers and Von Tobels were among the early church families instrumental in organizing the Fairbury congregation. Jacob Von Tobel in 1869 emigrated from Meilen, canton Zurich, Switzerland—the home of Elder Henry Geistlich who visited all the Apostolic Christian Churches in America in 1866—and sent for his fiancee, Katherine Keller, a year or so later. In 1871, they were married by Elder Rudolph Leuthold.

Nicholas Keller immigrated to Woodford County in 1863. He later moved to a farm near Wing, Illinois. Although it is not known for certain what year he moved to Wing, he was farming there by 1869. Ill health eventually forced him to quit farming. In 1874, he moved to Fairbury and became involved in business with his brother, Jacob Keller, and Jacob Von Tobel.

By the time these three men began their business venture, there had been some sporadic church activity in Fairbury. By March, 1874, the congregation had purchased a white frame building—the structure which had belonged to the First Presbyterian Church—for $1,100. It was located at 207 West Walnut Street. The brethren at that time might have been hard-pressed financially because they did not pay cash in full for the church building. Rather, they put $400 down and agreed to pay a total of $700 over a three-year period at eight percent interest (to be paid annually). The mortgage was signed by Jacob Keller, Gilgian Stoller, Jacob Von Tobel, Gottfried Eggli, and Nicholas and Anna Keller.

Jacob Von Tobel and Nicholas Keller very likely served as the first ministers at Fairbury. John Georg Steidinger came to Fairbury in 1875 when he was fifty years old and became the first Elder. He also had charge over the South Side congregation but eventually relinquished that duty to Christian Gerber. Steidinger was a native of Germany and was the father of Martin Steidinger who also served as Elder for a time at Fairbury and the South Side.

In 1884, a small house and lot adjacent to the church were acquired from Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Shepherd. The house was connected to the church to be used as a kitchen. A year later, the church purchased a plot of ground, 200 feet by 54 feet, from Albert Phelps in the Atkins Addition for use as a cemetery. This lot cost $50.

In the early 1890's—a time when immigration was progressing at high levels—the current church facilities became inadequate. In 1891, a lot was purchased from Gertrude Yakli Wagler and Christian Wagler. In 1892, $4,500 was raised to build a new church. A new building was erected on East Walnut Street with a seating capacity of 340. It was completed in 1893. John Schieler, one of the ministers of the church, supervised the construction.

The old church was moved from its original foundation. Two-thirds of it was moved to other locations, with one section later serving as a residence in Fairbury. The remaining section —approximately one-third of the old building—was transferred to the south edge of the church lot. It was used as a horse stable and to house a horse-drawn hearse.

The new church on East Walnut Street was a large, wood-frame, two-story structure. A large sanctuary occupied the second floor; dining facilities and a Sunday School were on the ground floor.

Fairbury historian Alma Lewis-James described the church:[6]

> Their church was a large, two story, white frame building on Paducah Avenue. In the rear, along three sides to form a courtyard, were the neat sheds for their horses and Klondike buggies. They were necessary for the protection of the animals in stormy weather because the services were day long meetings with bread and coffee served at noon.

This church was remodeled in 1950. It was sold to the Church of the Nazarene when the congregation moved into new quarters fifteen years later.

The congregation was the beneficiary of a beautiful new stone structure of Gothic styling which it occupied in 1965. Built at a cost of $308,177 and seating five hundred, it was built at 705 North Fourth Street on land donated by Katherine Roth. In 1978, more space was added for a hall and baby room. This project was completed in April, 1979.

In 1975, the church built a fellowship hall southwest of Fairbury on a plot of ground obtained from Duane Kilgus, a minister of the church. This picturesque area, complete with large playground facilities, was finished in the spring of 1976 at a cost of $181,000. It serves as a place for weddings of non-members, church suppers, "singings," and similar gatherings.

Resident Elders who have presided over the Fairbury church were John Georg Steidinger, Christian Gerber, Martin Steidinger, Peter Bach, Joshua Broquard, and Arthur Bahler. Joshua Broquard was ordained December 24, 1946, and was still serving in 1982. Arthur Bahler was ordained in 1980. David Mangold, Roanoke, Illinois; Emil Schubert, Peoria, Illinois; and Noah Schrock, Oakville, Iowa, served as Elders at Fairbury for interim periods.

The early 1930's was a difficult time in Fairbury as cleavage developed among the members primarily over the use of the English language (as opposed to the customary German) during the worship service. Auxiliary issues of controversy centered around how far the church should carry the Biblical themes of non-conformity to, and separation from, the world of sin. Those who were partial to the German language and who favored more exacting standards with respect to church order departed and formed what later became known as the German Apostolic Christian Church. The split was made final on February 7, 1932.

Although the church had suffered the effects of schism, it soon regrouped and growth again occurred. By 1980, nearly fifty years after the division, the church had progressed to a membership of over 250 with approximately 170 families. The church benefited in numbers when the South Side congregation closed down in 1949 and several members were absorbed into the Fairbury church. Also, by 1980 several families, whose heritage was associated with the German Apostolic Christian Church and subsequent splits, began to unite with the Apostolic Christian Church in Fairbury.

In November, 1962, the church built "Fairview Haven," a care center for elderly citizens. Originally, they cared for twenty-nine residents. By 1981 the home had forty-seven residents.

The worship of God at Fairbury has brought untold blessings to hundreds of people. An elderly couple, having been members of the church for fifty-five and sixty years respectively, was asked about their attitude concerning the Saviour and the church fellowship. They responded with the following testimony:[7]

> We think words cannot express the appreciation for the faith we found in our Saviour and Lord, and can enjoy fellowship with the Lord and with Christians of like faith, and as the years go on, we cherish it all more and more.

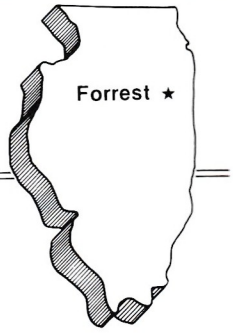
Due to the growth of the Sarasota congregation, Philip Wingeier moved from Alto, Michigan, to serve as a resident minister. He and his wife, Fern, purchased a home directly across from the new church. He retired as minister December 2, 1979.

Because winter crowds taxed the new building to capacity with numbers sometimes in excess of four hundred people in 1981, plans were formulated to add either a building to the rear of the present structure or a possible fellowship hall on the existing site.

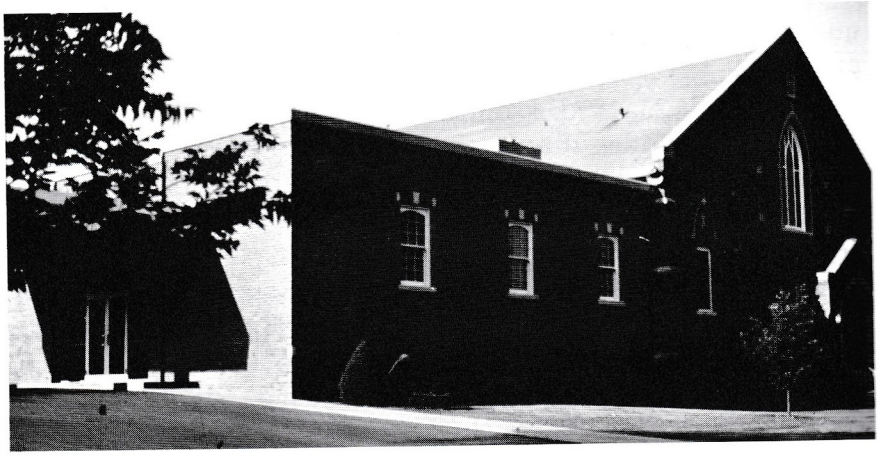
Ben C. Maibach, Jr., Detroit, Michigan, whose parents were very helpful in establishing this congregation, has served the church as Elder. He maintains a residence in Sarasota.

In April, 1983, work began on a new addition which provided one-third more space to the church facility. It cost $300,000.

FORREST, ILLINOIS



FORREST, ILLINOIS
300 West James Street



The demise of two country churches—one south of town and the other north of town—led to the establishment of a new, larger church in Forrest, Illinois, late in 1949.

Following World War II, society entered into an era of rapid change and progress. Significant advancement in modes of transportation and communication had made the world a much smaller place. Country schools, country churches, and small-town business districts all felt the effects of the great rush toward centralization.

The old North Side and South Side churches, both rich in historical lore—and possessing colloquial names which reflected their location—united in 1949 to form a larger church in Forrest, Illinois.

The country churches were deteriorating physically by the late 1940's, and rather than make repairs, both congregations, in view of bigger automobiles and better roads which allowed faster travel, acknowledged that the times demanded a larger church in Forrest. Most all the members of the North Side church and approximately one-half of the South Side members united to form the Forrest Apostolic Christian Church. The memory of these two country churches remains forever etched in the minds of those who attended those country worship services. But sadly, as time objectively marches on and "old timers" pass away, the collective memory of these churches fades, and it remains only for historians to transfer the essence of these memories onto the pages of history. In connection with this process, it can be said that while the Forrest, Illinois, congregations's history is relatively short, its historical roots, which reach deeply into the areas north and south of town, are both rich and inspiring. Ben Nussbaum's local histories on both churches bring alive the "olden days" associated with these churches.[9]

Discussions relative to the merger of the North Side and South Side churches began in the mid-1940's. Obviously, with a host of people affected by whatever decision was made as to the disposition of the congregations, conclusions were hard to reach, and progress was slow. Nevertheless, on July 11, 1947, several brethren purchased one-half of a city block in the northwest section of Forrest for $2,000 in the event a subsequent decision might be made to move the two congregations into Forrest.

On March 5, 1948, brothers from both country churches met in the North Side assembly room. A decision was reached to build a new church in Forrest. Accordingly, finance and building committees were formed. Construction began later that year on the previously purchased property in Forrest.

December 18, 1949, marked the first worship services in the new town church. Dedication was held in January, 1950, with Elders Noah Schrock, Oakville, Iowa; David Mangold, Roanoke, and Joe A. Getz, Morton, Illinois, among church officials present.

By 1968 a large addition to the church was completed to provide for better Sunday School, dining, and baby room facilities.

Henry Kilgus who served as Elder at the North Side church continued in this capacity at Forrest. He was very active in the Alabama missionary project until declining health prevented these efforts in 1962. He was succeeded as Elder at Forrest by Perry Zimmerman who was ordained December 9, 1970.[10]

By 1980, the Forrest church had 151 families and 231 members.[11]

ALTADENA, CALIFORNIA

ALTADENA, CALIFORNIA
2243 North El Molino Street

The first new church established within the denomination in the 1950's was at Altadena, California. Located on the northern edge of the Los Angeles metropolitan area between the city of Pasadena and the southern portions of the San Gabriel mountains, Altadena was typical of many western spots in California which drew families from the "East."

Persons of Apostolic Christian background, too, were lured to the area by the favorable climate, beautiful terrain, and